

Photo courtesy of Jason Boynton



New Beginnings

by Gertrude B. McClain

It's only the beginning now
...a pathway yet unknown
At times the sound of other steps
...sometimes we walk alone

The best beginnings of our lives
May sometimes end in sorrow
But even on our darkest days
The sun will shine tomorrow.

So we must do our very best
Whatever life may bring
And look beyond the winter chill
To smell the breath of spring.

Into each life will always come
A time to start anew
A new beginning for each heart
As fresh as morning dew.

Although the cares of life are great
And hands are bowed so low
The storms of life will leave behind
The wonder of a rainbow.

The years will never take away
Our chance to start anew
It's only the beginning now
So dreams can still come true.

Air Force Families Forever
*"Ensuring that the families of our fallen Airmen are never
forgotten by providing immediate and long-term
compassionate support."*

*Please know that we are not attempting to endorse any company, service or
product, nor are we attempting to impose any beliefs on you. We are simply
giving you options to explore as you desire.*





Rejuvenate Yourself!!!

Taking a break from reality and obligations is a great way of helping you feel rejuvenated and revitalized...

Here are some ideas:

If the funds are available, make a shopping trip especially for something new to wear which is bright, colorful. Then leave right away and enjoy your purchase...

Take a break from skipping lunch at work and grabbing something quick. Instead, eat something simple, colorful, fun, exotic or with wild flavors...no Burger King!!

Take one day out of your life and vow not to say a single word...Relax, enjoy the peace and silence...

Take a break from your daily routine...cure the boredom!!

Dream a dream of your perfect vacation...promise to put a little money aside regularly to make it happen...pennies add up!!

Take a break from life as you know it by sitting down and being still for 10 minutes...close your eyes and relax...let your thoughts come and go...

Give yourself permission to be you!! Take a break from the image that you have of yourself and the image you protect...as well as the image others have of you...

Stop!! Live in the moment, and enjoy the simple objects around you, a flower, a tree, a building, or the smell in the air...



Seven Ways & Seven Days to Renew Your Life

by Carole Lynne

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To renew and reinvent our lives, **WE NEED A PLAN!** Here it is: a seven-day process to work with over and over. **This plan incorporates physical, mental and spiritual work.** Use the whole seven-day process, or choose any one of the days to work with as you create the life you want.

Day 1: Re-Charge (A Day of Commitment)

Focus on changing your mindset: This is the day to change the thought patterns playing in your mind....get rid of phrases such as "I can't," insert thoughts such as "I can do it."

Tools for Day 1: Motivational books, music, dance, art, all that is inspirational.

Day 2: Re-Vamp (A Day of Planning)

- What changes do you need to make in your home/office?
- What changes do you need to make in your exercise routine, OR do you need to begin an exercise routine (with doctor's permission of course)?
- What changes do you need to make in your diet?

Tools for Day 2: notebook and pen, or computer.

Day 3: Re-Cycle (A Day of Throwing Out)

Choose an area of your home, your garage, your backyard, and clean it out thoroughly. Have three boxes set up: one for things to keep, one for things to repair, and one for things to give to others. The hard work begins. **(Do not tackle your whole house on this one-day.)**

Tools for Day 3: Boxes to sort things in, vacuum cleaner, broom, dust rags, music to play to cheer yourself on through this hard day of work.



Seven Ways & Seven Days to Renew Your Life

by Carole Lynne cont'd.

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Day 4: Re-Fresh (A Day of Refreshment)

This is the day of reward. If you cleaned out your office or home on day 3, then refresh this space with a new plant or bunch of flowers. Give yourself a present. Open the windows and make sure the light can shine in.

Tools for Day 4: A present for yourself.

Day 5: Re-Turn (A Day of Spiritual Contemplation)

This is a day to contemplate your spiritual values and re-turn to the values that are important to you. This is a quiet day of soul searching. Sit and connect with the God of your understanding and ask questions:

- What is the meaning of my life?
- What am I here to do in this lifetime?
- What am I proud of and what advances have I made in my life?
- Which areas of my life need work?

Tools for Day 5: An honest heart and an inquiring mind.

Day 6: Re-Invent (A Day to Change Patterns)

Yesterday was an assessment day. It was a hard day. Today is a day to make plans to change the parts of your life that need changing.

Tools for Day 6: notebook, pen, computer, a telephone, and appointment book.

Day 7: Re-Invest (An Investment Day in All That is Positive)

It is now time to think about the best way to spend your time and money. The entire week has been focused on your physical and spiritual life, now take a look at your financial life.

Tools for Day 7: Your financial records, your checkbook, and a willingness to make changes.



Pampering on a Budget

Whenever people hear the phrase “pamper yourself,” normally the first thing that comes to mind is a \$300 spa day, well there are ways to make this happen without breaking the bank ...

- *Buy a good smelling candle or scented oil to burn in your home
- *At-home date night with your spouse or children
- *Read a good book or magazine
- *Take a siesta/nap
- *Take a good book or laptop to a coffee shop
- *Buy yourself a bottle of perfume/cologne
- *Use the good china on a regular day
- *Buy a new bottle of nail polish and give yourself a manicure/pedicure
- *Download a few new songs from iTunes, or play your favorite CD or old album, and dance around your living room
- *Get a babysitter, and spend the afternoon at the library or bookstore
- *Take a warm bubble bath and relax with music, and glass of your favorite beverage
- *Head to the mall for a mini-makeover at a department store makeup counter
- *Treat yourself to a round of golf
- *Sunbathe on a nice day
- *Buy yourself a set of new underwear
- *Get a chair massage at the mall
- *At-home massage (couples)
- *Watch your favorite show/movie in peace
- *Buy a treat just for you at the grocery store
- *Wear a fancy outfit on a regular day
- *Have tea and cookies with a friend
- *Call a friend to catch up



Let's Celebrate Our Heroes and those who love them

Happy Birthday Donald X. Anthe – March 12th

Happy Birthday Robert W. Koyle III – April 1st

Happy Birthday Phil Ambard – April 4th

Happy Birthday Tim Ambard (son of Phil Ambard) – April 14th

Happy Birthday Kayelen Moller
(daughter of Melissa K. Moller) – April 29th

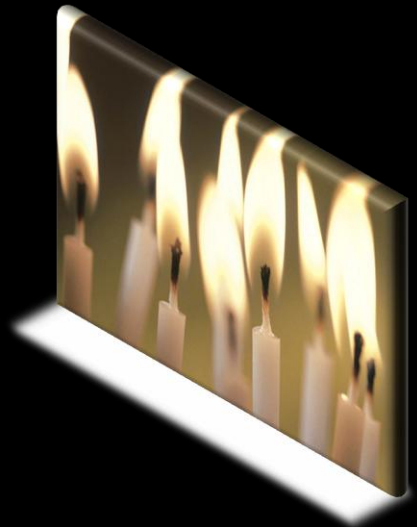
Happy Birthday Melissa K. Moller – May 9th
(Happy Anniversary to Melissa & Allen Moller – May 14th)

Happy Birthday Allen Moller (husband of Melissa K. Moller) –
May 17th

Happy Birthday Sean Michael DiCicco – May 20th

Happy Birthday Jeff Hill – May 29th
(Happy Anniversary to Jeff & Rachael Hill –
April 1st)

*Well wishes to the Forester Family on the
Memorial Day event in Manteca, CA
(May 27th), where their son and brother,
Mark will be honored





Skydiving with the Golden Knights

By: Rachael Hill
Surviving Spouse
of
Captain Jeff Hill, USAF

On February 22, 2012, I had the opportunity of a lifetime and it was a day I will never forget! I went skydiving for the very first time with the Army's Golden Knights Parachute Team and it was such an incredible experience! Not only that, but I was with the most amazing and inspiring group of women you could possibly imagine – a group of fellow military widows.

My journey as a military widow began on July 28, 2010 when my husband's C-17 crashed while practicing for the Arctic Thunder Air Show at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska. That moment forever changed my life and I was welcomed into a club I never wanted to be a part of. It has been a journey of ups and downs, with many bumps along the way. However, it has also given me some opportunities I never thought possible and has put me in contact with some of the most amazing people I have ever met!

After my husband's death I became involved with the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), an incredible organization that supports survivors of military deaths – all survivors! Through TAPS I recently had the opportunity to go to a "Widow's Retreat" in Key Largo, FL. There were 43 military widows at the retreat with 43 different stories and 43 different situations, but that didn't matter. In our eyes we were all the same and came together through this common bond. While at the retreat we relaxed on the beach, enjoyed casual and deep conversations, enjoyed various water sports, and then drove to Homestead ARB for a day of adventure, skydiving with the Golden Knights!

Words can't even describe the rush of skydiving itself but for me the entire experience was so much more than simply jumping out of an airplane, free falling through the air, and then safely returning to earth. There was a much bigger representation with extremely significant feelings associated with it.

Jumping out of an airplane could easily be compared to becoming a widow. It is scary! There is a nervousness and apprehension that you can't quite explain to anyone else, and of course there is always that uncertainty of what is going to happen and how you are going to come out of it in the end. However, despite all of those fears and apprehensions, you just have to jump in feet first...all or nothing. Although you may have times of fear and queasiness during your journey, you *will* eventually put both feet out and land safely on the ground. The whole process seemed easier for some than for others but those were truly just the outward appearances. Underneath all of the shells, we all had our uncertainties about what we were doing, how we were feeling, and how it was going to go.

Being a widow is really no different. It is definitely scary! There is always that nervousness and apprehension, a constant wondering if you're doing the right thing and making the right decisions, but ultimately you don't have a choice. You *have* to just jump in feet first...all or nothing. We all handle our grief and personal experiences in different ways and show very different outward appearances, but the more you dig into it the more you find that there are very similar fears, wants, needs, and concerns in all of us. That bond is inevitable.

Over and over the instructor kept saying, "trust in us, trust in the equipment, relax and you'll have fun." This phrase continues to roll through my mind and is such a metaphor for so many things in life. Especially life itself!



Skydiving with the Golden Knights cont'd

By: Rachael Hill
Surviving Spouse
of
Captain Jeff Hill, USAF

As a woman and a wife, one of the greatest feelings in the world was knowing that my husband would do everything he could to be sure I was taken care of, no matter what challenge life threw at us. I knew that he would always be there for me and I trusted him with absolutely every part of my being! This skydiving event was the first time I have felt that kind of trust and security since his death a year and a half ago. This time, I had to put that trust in my skydiving instructor, and I knew in my heart that no matter what happened he was going to make sure I was taken care of. "Trust in us, trust in the equipment, relax and you'll have fun." After 18 months of being the strong one and carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders, I was finally able to let all of that go and have 30 minutes of feeling that security I have desperately been missing! 30 minutes of not having to be responsible for everything. 30 minutes of knowing that I could be the one to trust in someone else again without any hesitation. That in itself was an amazing feeling and even a life "reboot" that I didn't really know I needed.

There is also something to be said about the physical closeness between a man and a woman. I am not talking in a sexual way, but just in that secure feeling kind of way. It sounds silly, but before climbing into the airplane my instructor put his hand on the small of my back and guided me up the ladder. No big deal right?! Not true. It *is* a big deal and again goes back to creating that feeling of security and believing that he would make sure I was safe. I never realized such a seemingly small gesture could have such a profound affect.

Another one of those moments was when my instructor was tightening my harnesses and getting everything ready to go. Let's be honest, you are in extremely close proximity to one another so it is hard not to feel that closeness with this other person. He had me first sit on the end of his knees to do the bottom harness straps and then on the bench with his knees on the outside of mine to do the top straps. While sitting on the bench I had to lean back so he could reach around and tighten everything up before our jump. Again, it was not sexual in any way, but it was just relaxing back into him that gave a feeling of comfortable security, that moment was something I have not felt in a long time. For that brief moment all of the stress and responsibility I was holding onto seemed to drift away. It was a moment that was probably very nonchalant and "every day" for him, but had a huge impact on me and I will do my best to hold onto that feeling for a very long time.

"Trust in us, trust in the equipment, relax and you'll have fun." I have decided that this is my new motto for my life. I am going to trust in myself and the decisions I make, trust in the equipment God has given me in this crazy thing we call life, and I truly believe that if I *do* these things and relax in the process that I *will* have fun. That is how life should be. That is how my husband would want my life to be.

So thank you Golden Knights for not only the amazing skydiving experience you provided, but for also teaching me this incredible lesson in life. Thank you TAPS for giving me the opportunity to be around other widows and for taking us on this new, exciting adventure. And thank you to all of my new widow friends who have taught me that although life may not be what any of us imagined, we are never alone in this journey and that there is still hope for a future that can always be just as bright, if not brighter, than what it was when our loved ones were here with us.

WHAT HELPS ME...

***By
Rose Burroughs
Mom of
Airman Jamie Burroughs***



Thank you so much for doing this. I'm sure many feel as I do and reaching out to people who know how you feel is sometimes the only support you want. Family and friends try to help as best as they can however, to experience a loss, especially one of a child as I have, is in itself the most gut wrenching event someone can ever go through. My heart goes out to all who are experiencing this pain.

I've recently attended a support group called The Compassionate Friends who deals with people who have lost a child. They have chapters all over the country. They have a website, which I believe was posted in the last newsletter. www.compassionatefriends.org...I urge you to attend a meeting. It does truly help. I've attended other grief support groups but this one is different as it deals with all the feelings you experience after losing a son or daughter.

My son, Jamie, was stationed at Mountainhome AFB, Idaho. He was killed in a vehicle accident off base on January 22, 2011. There's not an hour that goes by that I'm not thinking of Jamie. He's the first person I think of in the morning and the last one I pray for at night. He is my middle child. I am finding difficulty in talking with my two other children. The four of us have always been close. I am a single mother and raised them on my own. So our bond is unbreakable. However, since Jamie was called Home, I am finding it difficult to express myself to my other two children. I've always been the affectionate type but now find it hard to hug and to be open with them. If I find myself enjoying a moment or begin to laugh, I stop myself. I feel guilty because Jamie isn't here to do share in what we call "life."

My son enjoyed life to its fullest. He was my dare devil; my affectionate one; and lived life like no other. I am sure he's looking down at me and is sad because of the way I am handling this. There's a void in my life that I just can't seem to fill. I am hoping with continued meetings and of course, through prayer, I will learn to live my life again.

I could go on and on but I just wanted to take a few minutes to let you know that I appreciate all you do as well as what the Air Force has done for me and my family. I know now why Jamie loved being a part of this special "team". May God Bless you all!



WHAT HELPS ME CONT'D.....

"I would like to suggest this to all of our grieving families: Gather your family and plant a tree in honor of the one you've lost. Digging the hole, preparing the ground, planting the tree with my 2 girls and their mother gave me such a sense of closure, it washed over me. It was almost like being set free....."

~John D. DiCicco (Father of SSgt Sean Michael DiCicco)

"My son Don loved to karaoke. He went out to karaoke, and went up to sing 'Stone Cold Sober' every time. To honor him, myself and his brother go out every year to karaoke, with a few friends and family. It was really hard the first 2 years, but this year went much better. We make this an annual event near his birthday."

~Kathleen Anthe (Mother of SrA Donald X. Anthe)

"I am attending a local chapter of 'The Compassionate Friends.' They are a group for parents who have lost a child. This is helpful because although other bereavement groups are OK, we are all parents of a like mind."

~Karl Porfirio (Father of SrA Tre Porfirio)

"Mother's Day holds a special memory for me...My last Mother's Day memory that Ryan celebrated with me was while he was deployed to Afghanistan, he sent me a beautiful pink box with a special note attached that said 'thanks for always being my mom.' I still have the note and box and will treasure the memory forever. I am so proud to be Ryan's mom."

"A beautiful lesson in life is to live life in the moment...you never know when those moments will stop."

"Understanding Your Grief' by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD and the journal that accompanies it was very helpful to me through my grief journey."

~Chrissy Matthews (Mother of SrA Ryan J. Matthews)





**MAJ Phil Ambard
with his youngest son,
Tim Ambard**

**Grief Is Just Such a Personal Journey
by Linda Ambard (Wife of MAJ Phil Ambard)**

Grief is such a personal journey. While some people want to pretend that the death never happened or are content never to speak of the unthinkable tragedy in their lives, others need to talk about the dire circumstances and events that led to the crushing loss. While I am not a talker, I am a writer and in writing, I have injured at least one of my children because he is just the opposite of me. Initially I began blogging because it was easier than talking about how I feel and the fact is, I can write about things I could never say out loud. I continued writing, and in my faith and in my process of dealing with Phil's death, the compulsion has been unquenchable and the desire burns torridly hot to continue this journey until 27 April 2011.

I have tried to honor Phil's memory and his life song because I truly believe that he led a remarkable life that left such a legacy. His life song is etched onto this girl's heart. I am the woman I am today because he loved me well for 23 years. He believed in me and he supported me no matter what my dream was. We made quite the parenting team. I think that was what we were called to do as a couple because we have five remarkable children etching their own way in life. Do I think that my Phil was perfect? No, but I am not either. He was perfect for me, however. My words will never give Phil the man justice, but my writing is my heart.

Going back to the way people process death, my journey is solely my own. I cannot fault another for anger or for his words disagreeing with the way I am processing Phil's death. I am not sure that there is a right or wrong way or a definitive timeline. Where one day, one week, or even a month slips by and I am feeling like I am gaining control over my feelings and life, the next day, week, or even month can break me anew. Something happens and I am immediately thrown back to the insecurities of walking without my Phil and facing a future without him. I wonder if the 27th of any month will ever pass when I don't think of our anniversary and his death. I wonder if April will ever bring joy? I wonder if I will ever be whole again. Yes, I have found happiness and I am stepping forward, but the journey is so terribly difficult and personal. I do what I do--run, write, and pray, especially, I pray--to process my own emotions.

I am not asking for permission at the age of 50 on how to live my life. I am not asking or seeking validation in my writing because like the child who struggles with my writing, there is a choice. I choose to write and he can choose to read or not to read. My blogs may only be for the friends and family walking this journey with me, or God may use them in a bigger plan as other people walk this same trek, but here is the thing. I am healing through the writing of my thoughts. It is like letting go of a balloon and watching the red lazily disappear into the velvety skies above. I press on because at some point the red balloon will be hidden behind the white billowing clouds. Though ever present, the balloon, or Phil's death, will compel me like an arrow to my own destiny where ever the will of God takes me. I step forward confidently and with a sadness borne of Phil not being able to share this journey knowing that although he was a very private person, he did like knowing that his life mattered, and, oh, how his life mattered to so many.

A NEW MEMBER OF THE FAMILY...

"Aggie"

by Judy Gentz (Mother of LT Joel Gentz)

On March 1st I drove to the Detroit Airport to pick up MSgt Christopher "Aggie" Aguilera. Aggie came for a weekend visit, to meet my husband and son, and to help promote Team Red, White and Blue in our community. Aggie is one of two survivors of the helicopter crash resulting from enemy fire that killed our son, Capt Joel Gentz on 6/9/10. I want to share very briefly how important Aggie is to me, and now my family.

Aggie has been able to answer simple questions and offer reassurance that the USAF could not, because he was there. Aggie has allowed us to share grief with him and he has shared his with us. I hope that our relationship helps to ease some of the guilt Aggie is left with. His surviving the crash has been a ray of light in our darkest times. My younger son spent a lot of time with Aggie. This really helped him acknowledge painful feelings of longing for Joel...his older brother. Aggie offered brotherhood to Jared, and to my husband and myself, Aggie has allowed us to "adopt" him. I look forward to him meeting our daughter someday soon, and him and his wife being a part of our extended family.

I know Aggie is not Joel, so there's no pretending of a replacement here. But, I feel very strongly that Joel would want us to have a relationship with Aggie, who suffered multiple injuries and is alive by a miracle of sorts. I also think Joel would want us to stay in touch with the other Airmen that he worked with, so that in lonely times of deployment, we reach out with care packages, letters, etc.

The pain in my heart is indescribable at times...the yearning to hear Joel's voice, to get that awesome AF hug. Nothing really makes that go away. But, during those other moments, I find reaching out to other Airmen brings to the forefront all of the feelings I had before Joel's death, namely love and compassion. These are the feelings of a mother...and that's who I am, now with a Gold Star pin to wear.



Upcoming TAPS Events



Sibling Retreat

Wednesday, April 11, 2012 – Sunday, April 15, 2012

Location: Seattle, WA

Redstone Arsenal Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Friday, April 13, 2012 – Saturday, April 14, 2012

Location: Redstone Arsenal, AL

Fort Carson Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Friday, April 27, 2012 – Saturday, April 28, 2012

Location: Homestead, FL

Fort Riley Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Friday, May 4, 2012 – Saturday, May 5, 2012

Location: Fort Riley, KS

18th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

Thursday, May 24, 2012 – Monday, May 28, 2012

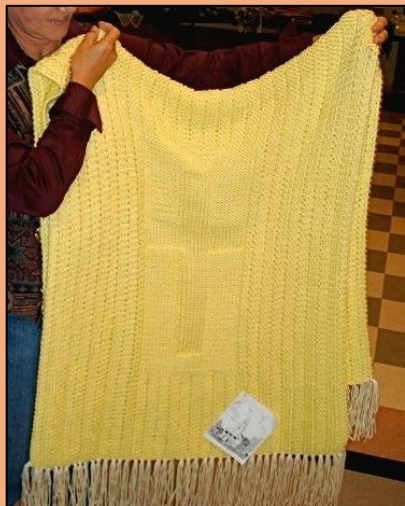
Location: Arlington, VA

TAPS website: www.taps.org or call the phone number listed above for more detailed information about upcoming events

The US Air Force proudly endorses the TAPS organization

Support Center

Note: These resources provide additional information that may be useful or interesting and are provided consistent with the intended purpose of the Air Force Families Forever Program Newsletter. However, Air Force Families Forever Program cannot attest to the accuracy of information provided by these resources or any other linked resources. Air Force Families Forever Program providing resources does not constitute an endorsement by our program or any of the sponsors of the resources or the information presented.



<http://webpages.charter.net/ps4fs/Shawls/>
Access the above website if you would like to request a prayer shawl. The prayer shawls are handmade and sent to the families of fallen service men and women.



<http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org/>



Journey of Hearts

<http://www.journeyofhearts.org/grief/accident2.html>



Scholarship Links

www.afcrossroads.com
www.military.com
www.militaryscholar.org
www.finaid.org
www.afsahq.org
www.fastweb.com

Support Center cont'd



The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

Toll-free: 877-969-0010

PH: 630-990-0010

Website:

www.compassionatefriends.org

Local chapters in your area

Visit The Compassionate Friends Website to find support groups in your area. This organization caters to the needs of grieving parents/stepparents, grandparents, and siblings

References used for newsletter:

www.healing.about.com

www.exploringwomanhood.com

www.parenting.com

Air Force Families Forever

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<http://www.mortuary.af.mil/library/familiesofthefallensupportbranch/index.asp>

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